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## Ethics, Collaboration, and Knowledge Production: Digital Storytelling with Sexually Diverse Farmworkers in California

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**ABSTRACT** This article outlines the digital storytelling methods used for a community based research project focused on issues of sexuality among California farmworkers: *Sexualidades Campesinas*. We note how our process of collaboration in the creation and production of digital stories was shaped by the context and our envisioned storytellers. We then offer a critical analysis of our own unique experience with digital storytelling in this project, focusing on a handful of concepts key to understanding the nature of our collaborative production process: community, affect and collaboration, storytelling, performance, and mediation, with an eye to the problem of ethics.

In 2011, we launched [Sexualidades Campesinas](#), a digital storytelling project aimed at making visible issues related to the sexual diversity of immigrant farmworkers in California. We chose digital storytelling as part of a critical paradigm on Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) that facilitates the expression of personal stories of individuals with little or no access to the public sphere (e.g., oral history, *testimonio*, documentary film, ethnographic interviews, etc.). The promise offered by digital storytelling methods for maximizing storytellers' agency in the production process and the accessibility of audiovisual stories as final product attracted us for its ethical potential. We envisioned a collaborative process of knowledge production building on practices of community engagement and engaged scholarship.<sup>1</sup> However, our project, while oriented to community needs, could not be carried out in the same way as other community-based digital storytelling projects due to the need for anonymity on the part of potential storytellers, who—we thought—would not be ready to assume a public posture on their sexuality, and who, depending on their immigration status, indeed might not be ready to assume a public position at all.

We decided not to use a workshop format with groups of potential storytellers, and instead worked one-on-one, or in small groups. While our use of digital storytelling veered from a typical model of digital storytelling, we nonetheless believed that this genre was the right one for our project. Still, we remained concerned about the ethics of our collaboration with this vulnerable population, and therefore maintained a posture of self-criticism at every stage. Did digital storytelling methods, altered by the idiosyncrasies of our project, allow us to minimize our role as mediators and to ensure that storytellers assumed maximum ownership of their stories? In this article, we first outline the methods that have guided our project, noting how they differ from other approaches to collaboration in the creation and production of digital stories as laid out by Joe Lambert and the StoryCenter (formerly Center for Digital Storytelling).<sup>2</sup> We then offer a critical analysis of our own unique experience with digital storytelling, focusing on a handful of

concepts key to understanding the nature of our collaborative production process: community, affect and collaboration, storytelling, performance, and mediation.

Our writing embraces “we” as a subject of enunciation, a strategy to foreground the role of collaboration and collective knowledge of *Sexualidades Campesinas*. “We” marks us as a research group in order to accept responsibility for the research design and our motivation for publishing, which are interests we share (and which differentiate us) as scholars.<sup>3</sup> We are aware of the potential of erasing the heterogeneity of backgrounds, identities, positionalities, and roles of the members of our group. But, we use this collective identity to highlight the outcomes of our negotiation over the tensions and differences during the process of digital storytelling and writing this article. Our “we” reflects an ongoing commitment to thinking, learning, and writing together. This collaborative paradigm of “we” reflects Community-Based Participatory Research’s commitment to transform and reevaluate scholarship practices within the academy, particularly in the humanities. To think, learn, and write collectively is a necessary step to democratize the epistemic practice of knowledge production in spite of differences and tensions, especially in the construction of an ongoing dialogue between intellectual communities inside and out the academy.

### **Sexualidades Campesinas**

*Sexualidades Campesinas* is a critical public humanities project, funded by Cal Humanities, the California Studies Consortium of the University of California’s Humanities Resource Institute, and the University of California’s Institute for Mexico and the United States (commonly known as UC MEXUS), that focuses on issues of sexual diversity among rural farm workers of California’s Central Valley and Central Coast regions. It aims, through the techniques of digital storytelling, to enable sexually heterodox farmworkers to produce personal stories of their everyday experiences, struggles, and triumphs whose public dissemination they believe would benefit other sexually diverse farmworkers. We used the category of “sexually heterodox” as interchangeable with LGBTQI but we decided to foreground it to recognize the different politics of sexual identities of our collaborators for whom LGBTQI can be an externally imposed category. Our mediation, which required great care, informed our preference for vague terms such as “sexual diversity” or “sexual heterogeneity” rather than more politically charged and reductive terms such as “gay,” “lesbian,” “queer,” or “homosexual.” And although our project did not target a specific nationality, the majority of our storytellers identify as Mexican or Mexican American.

Most representations of rural farm workers portray them as single heterosexual men, as married men who may be temporarily separated from their families, as entire families; or even as children, who have sometimes been exploited as farm laborers. Sexual diversity is rarely associated with this population. However, recent research on Mexican masculinities, farmworker sexuality, and migration suggests that there is no reason to expect that the lived experience of laborers working in rural California coincides at all with well-known stereotypes.<sup>4</sup> Thus, the reality of sexual diversity among California’s farmworkers remains largely invisible, even within farm worker communities. The invisibility of sexually heterodox farmworkers is, on the one hand, the product of homophobia that makes individuals reluctant to “come out” publicly, even within their communities or their own families, and, on the other hand, may be the result of their reluctance to make any aspect of their lives visible to a world that is suspicious of and unwelcoming to farm laborers, particularly Spanish speakers, who are often assumed to be undocumented. Their invisibility, along with the possibility that many sexually heterodox farmworkers may not conform to mainstream US (or Mexican) notions of sexual categories, makes it difficult for community service organizations to offer

appropriate services to this group, or for farmworker communities themselves to establish support structures. The provision of appropriate services to this population and the establishment of support structures are further complicated by the rural setting of these farm work communities.

*Sexualidades Campesinas's* website currently hosts five digital stories created in collaboration with six storytellers, whose collaboration began in 2010. All stories have been published digitally and bilingually on our website: <http://sexualidadescampesinas.ucdavis.edu/>. Even though our IRB narrative—written before we started recruitment—stated we would guarantee the anonymity of storytellers, all participants chose to use their real names and even include pictures and videos from their personal archives. Overall, participation in the project reflected a deep commitment to the project as participants were not paid and the production of each story required between ten and twenty hours with facilitators. The immediate audience of the stories was limited to other storytellers and their circles, but audiences at community and campus public forums in the Sacramento metropolitan region, as well as at academic meetings in the United States, Mexico and Costa Rica also experienced the emotional power of the stories.

### **Digital Storytelling: Foundational Practices and Project Improvisations**

Digital storytelling employs collaborative processes of production that can empower storytellers, regardless of their experience or education level, to tell the stories that they wish to tell. Incorporating formal narrative techniques and selecting visual images, whether still or moving, helps ensure that their stories will make the impact they envision.

Digital storytelling stands out from other genres of Community-Based Participatory Research, such as oral history, *testimonio*, documentary film, or ethnographic interviews, for the degree of agency that community storytellers assume in creation and production. As a collaborative method, digital storytelling challenges research hierarchies in which only the researcher decides on the contents of the final narrative, and draws attention to questions regarding ethical uses of technology and the political uses of self-representation and dissemination. Using everyday devices—such as disposable cameras, smartphones, and laptop computers—and freeware or otherwise easy to obtain software such as Audacity and iMovie, and employing easily learned techniques for the creation, production, and editing of digitally produced audiovisual narratives—mini-documentary films, of a sort—digital storytelling is a democratizing storytelling genre, an expression of “vernacular creativity”<sup>5</sup> that allows just about anyone to produce a polished, internet-ready, visually attractive narrative. Nick Couldry argues that “digital storytelling contributes to a democratization of media resources and widening the conditions of democracy itself. Digital storytelling vastly extends the number of people who at least in principle can be registered as contributing to the public sphere.”<sup>6</sup>

Digital storytelling participatory media techniques—as developed by the StoryCenter in Berkeley, California, which over the past two decades has “manag[ed] over 200 small- to large-scale projects, [led] over 1000 workshops, and assist[ed] more than 15,000 individuals to complete films”—follow a set of procedures with which an informed facilitator can enable a group (e.g., a community assembly, a class of students, an activist organization) to construct and produce personal stories.<sup>7</sup> The group itself does most of the work, with the facilitator guiding and teaching the community to administer its own collective production process.

We were aware from the beginning that such a collective process would not apply to our project. There are very few community groups focusing on issues of sexual diversity in the rural and semirural settings in which most immigrant farmworkers live and work. And

even if such groups existed, many sexually heterodox farmworkers would be unlikely to feel comfortable discussing very private aspects of their lives in such public forums. Of course, a digital storytelling project that aims to post personal narratives on a website is also a public forum. However, our project protocol was established so as to guarantee the anonymity of all community partners we spoke to, save for those who agreed to reveal identifying details such as their faces, voices, names, or any other traits or specific anecdotes that might risk compromising their privacy. We could not expect to employ the “story circle” model suggested by the StoryCenter; instead we would resort to improvisation.

We knew that even though the devices and techniques used for digital storytelling are more accessible than the devices and techniques used in other audiovisual genres, they are not universally available. We saw some of our own collaborators struggle with access to technology. We were told stories about using phones to write school essays or losing pictures from archives of outdated or broken laptops. In contrast, our own equipment included Zoom recorders and Flip and Canon cameras, and each research member owned a laptop and a smartphone (almost exclusively MacBooks and iPhones). These symbols of our privilege as academics were reminders of the challenges of establishing a collaboration relationship, which was what attracted us to digital storytelling as methodology in the first place. Our commitment to our version of digital storytelling arose from embracing a very self-conscious collaboration as the center of our methodology. Acutely aware that we could not “eradicat[e]” our own “expert” power,<sup>8</sup> we realized that we needed to acknowledge that digital storytelling is inevitably a product of “co-creativity;”<sup>2</sup> nonetheless, it was important to us to seek out strategies to minimize our interventions as mediators so that our storyteller collaborators would be confident in their roles as primary authors and directors of their digital stories. This movement towards the recognition of the politics of positionality in creative collaboration and knowledge production opened up spaces to decentralize academia in the representation of immigrants. Dialogue and collaboration needed to be at the center in representing LGBTQI farmworkers, while using our privilege and resources to create the visibility that our collaborators wanted.

And as we moved forward, developing our own method of one-on-one collaborations in digital storytelling, we experienced a process that was highly labor intensive—no economies of scale—and whose ethical dimensions were unclear. How could we work one-on-one, or in groups that inverted digital storytelling methodology by involving two or more facilitators in the production of a single storyteller’s story, and yet ensure that community storytellers maintained agency of their stories without feeling undue influence from facilitators, and felt complete ownership of their stories? While practitioners of digital storytelling have begun questioning the ethics of the particular collaborative processes underlying this genre,<sup>10</sup> and we had addressed some of these in advance (e.g., our procedures regarding consent and confidentiality were carefully crafted to avoid harm and to guarantee storytellers the opportunity to withdraw from the project at any time—and even to have their videos removed from our website after completion), but the issue of what Aline Gubrium, Amy Hill, and Sarah Flicker refer to as the “power of shaping” loomed large throughout the course of our project.<sup>11</sup>

## Community

As researchers interested in collaborating with the “community”—an in-existent collective manifestation of our imagined collaborators—the very process of identifying a community that fits the parameters of the *Sexualidades Campesinas* project is challenging. For example, mainstream LGBTQI community organizations seem largely unaware of, and lack strategies to reach sexually heterodox immigrant farmworkers; likewise what community

organizations do exist among farmworkers—whether focused on issues of health, labor, family, education, law, etc.—rarely address issues related to sexual diversity. As we struggled to design an ethical community-based research protocol, we committed to working not with organizations, but with individuals whose experiences are not universally understood nor shared through a sense of community, let alone documented in an archive. Community, in reference to farmworkers with diverse sexualities and gender identities, became a difficult notion to pin down.

The temporality of farm labor itself offered another set of challenges. The transitory nature of seasonal work means that whatever communities form in a given place may be ephemeral, and our storytellers were not necessarily likely to stay put and form part of a rooted community wherever they were working that season, and even if they did, the irregularity of their work schedules (very long hours during the harvest season, or piecemeal odd jobs in the off-season) was not necessarily conducive to their becoming an active member of any community. In working with several research participants from different geographic locations, it became evident that there was very little sense of community amongst sexually diverse farmworkers. We noted that even farm labor was an abstraction that tied workers together only loosely.

Another important factor that limits community building is the taboo of discussing non-heterosexual and non-cisgender difference within immigrant and farm working communities. While in much of Mexico sexual diversity has become part of everyday life, whether in the streets or in the media, and legal advances on issues such as gay marriage, adoption by same-sex couples, and transgender rights have made the news, California's farmworkers hail mainly from rural areas of Mexico where intolerance remains prominent.<sup>12</sup> While we met storytellers who wanted to tell the world about their experiences, there were others who wanted to tell their story, but not necessarily in such a public manner. And we encountered others who were interested in our project, but unwilling to participate, even anonymously.

The notion of community, of an imagined community of sexually diverse farmworkers, was key to the participation of others. Storytellers expressed their desire to connect with others who shared similar experiences and interest in constructing community ties in a real material way, hoping that our website might help bring people together. But apart from their networks—groups of friends or links to urban or internet-based social and cultural organizations that did little to welcome migrant farmworkers—our storytellers did not see themselves as part of any definable LGBTQI community.

For all these reasons, the embodied experience of working in the genre of digital storytelling—whose methods are conceived to be community-based, in a context where the imagined community in question does not exist in any material way—serves as a constructive place to question our very invocation of community. In terms of ethics, the idea of a community, both ungraspable and utilitarian, is a constant reminder that our process is not participatory in and of itself. The notion of community is often evoked as a way to express an end rather than a means. Community is both implicit and abstract. While many grassroots digital storytelling projects are initiated by community groups and start from the assumption of the group's own stability, our project posited community as a formation in the making, a process aimed at establishing connections.<sup>13</sup> Everyday notions of community often assume a stagnant, fixed entity—an entity that creates boundaries, definitions, and an ontological stasis.<sup>14</sup>

The concept of community for *Sexualidades Campesinas* is instead a contested term. Community carries with it political implications that change over time and space. While difficult to pin down, community is a useful tool for understanding the practice of

engaging in a shared space with others. In our efforts to conceptually grasp and name a particular experience, it became evident that any notion of an LGBTQI farmworker community as a stable and homogeneous group was not meaningful or helpful. Indeed, it became clear that it was more useful to assume a more critical perspective toward such notions, and to imagine communities as plural and constantly in flux, ambiguously defined and heterogeneous—more akin to the notion of “assemblage” employed by some social theorists.<sup>15</sup>

As researchers, we found ourselves working with a number of different participants who imagined themselves “in community” with different groups, and whose particular experiences of sexual diversity did not necessarily coincide with those of others comprising these groups. Our community-based research is, then, more than a two-way negotiation with difference and ethics. It is a community of assemblages. Furthermore, many of the individuals who signed on to contribute their own digital stories did not know of other sexually diverse farmworkers, let alone see themselves as part of a community of sexually diverse farmworkers. Indeed, one of the digital stories produced for our project outright rejects the use of abstract unifying categories: “*Hombre, mujer o pescado*” (Man, Woman or Fish) ends with a monologue promoting self-acceptance by rejecting identity categories (e.g. lesbian, gay, straight) and instead embracing that we all are just “*personas amando al amor*” (people loving love).

On the other hand, the lack of defined community organizations did not necessarily mean that our storytellers did not wish to access some kind of community of sexually diverse farmworkers. Our establishment of a bilingual website (<http://sexualidadescampesinas.ucdavis.edu/en/about-the-project/>) assembling digital stories of sexually heterodox farmworkers helped some of them to envision this community, and may, perhaps, eventually bring it into more concrete being. Designing a virtual space that was accessible to English and Spanish speakers represented a strategy to allow storytellers to construct community, at least in this digital manifestation, on their own terms. Every storyteller consented to share their story publicly and agreed that an online presence could be helpful to other sexually diverse farmworkers facing similar challenges to the ones they share in their stories.

Negotiating questions of visibility is an ethical concern of our process. There are constant tensions between revealing the particularities of each story and generalizing the experience of being an LGBTQI farmworker, as well as between sharing stories publicly and protecting storytellers’ decisions of what not to reveal. Visibility is also a major ethical component of our participants’ decisions to tell their stories, as they chose to be vulnerable when consenting to share their stories publicly. The will to participate in the project itself indicated to us a great need to draw material connections within the farm working community. We asked ourselves, “Who is telling us their story?” All of our storytellers are, in fact, farmworkers (or former farmworkers) who had already worked through many of the issues regarding the potential visibility of their difference prior to meeting us. In some cases they, or other contacts of ours, told us of other farmworkers whose stories might be of interest to our project, but who ultimately chose not to tell their stories or, in some cases, even speak to us.

The process of identifying a potential community itself was, then, quite daunting; still, this non-existent community forced us to think through the purpose of community-based research approaches. Our intent was not to perform community, yet we acknowledge that creating a website where singular narratives are curated under the theme of “sexualidades campesinas” gives this impression. Our presence on the internet undoubtedly will serve as a space for individuals to connect with each other, or, at the very least, to see parts of their experiences reflected on the website. It is clear to us that both

temporality and space are important factors in the question of constructions of community.<sup>16</sup> We also recognize that the process of making stories visible (e.g. through public and mass media) is itself a process of community formation.

However, in the end we were left with a number of methodological and ethical questions: How well do these two to three minute stories narrated by these storytellers represent a larger community experience? And if the community does not exist, how does one particular representation connect to another, even if both present themselves as representing an experience they believe to be important to this imagined community? Is their final project, a very brief digital story, actually capable of communicating some representative account of a given participant's experience or vision? Furthermore, are these stories, which are unlikely to be revised any further once they are published online, capable of capturing to any significant degree the fluidity and dynamism of community? And finally, as any notions of community constructed through this project must be extrapolated from the stories posted on our website, limited as they are by the circumstances described above, how limited is this project's community building potential? These questions, obvious in the case of our idiosyncratic digital storytelling project, signal similar dynamics in more conventional digital storytelling projects, as well as any other form of community-based research.

### **Collaboration: Affect and Intimacy**

As a methodology that seeks to help people to find or reclaim their voices and tell their stories in an emotionally compelling way, digital storytelling is, to a certain extent, about touching, moving oneself and others. It is about embracing subjectivity and uncertainty in order to connect ethically with each other. As expressed by Jean Burgess, "[f]or the storyteller, the digital story is a means of 'becoming real' to others, on the basis of shared experience and affective resonances. Many of the stories are, quite literally, *touching*."<sup>17</sup> Undoubtedly, there is an affective dimension in crafting and sharing one's own story, perhaps even more so if one is to tell it in a three to five minute video. The hope is that this emotional dimension is evoked when others watch the digital story. Photos, narratives, whole stories might recapture the warmth of human intimacy and affective processes of self-recognition, social identity, family reconfiguration, etc. Because these videos seek to enact and present stories of people's lives that might not be heard otherwise, the point of departure of digital storytelling here is always already affectively charged. Recognizing the emotional dimension in community-based research practices enables a dismantling of the hierarchies of knowledge production that are solely based on academic disciplinary inquiry. Digital visual media offers potentialities for reflecting about affect in community-based participatory methods with which to capture ephemeral nuances of working in collaboration and creating a sense of community.

The process of crafting a warmly compelling personal tale, of finding a unique voice, and of arranging meaningful pictures takes time, effort and, in our case, multiple encounters. Our approach to digital storytelling differs, as we have already stated, from the methodology used at the StoryCenter, which is laid out in Joe Lambert's helpful guide.<sup>18</sup> Our mostly one-on-one collaborations have often taken place in private and insulated settings. Ethics played a role in how, when, and where to meet: we developed relationships with storytellers even before we starting working on the digital storytelling process, working hard to establish non-hierarchical relationships of mutual trust. The intimate atmosphere in these encounters has produced an especially pronounced bonding experience between collaborators and facilitators and has formed relationships marked by a profound sense of confidence and intimacy.



Before explaining further, it is important to highlight that in a project such as ours, intimacy is not reduced to the individual, since storytelling is a form that expresses a collective intimacy. The storytelling process itself, similar to the form of oral histories, brings about a kind of intimacy that is meant to be shared. In turn, the responsibility of building trust and respect with every storyteller became greater as we advanced in the process and thought about each story.

Constructing an emotionally captivating story may be challenging and sometimes frightening, particularly when it may involve topics such as “coming out,” non-normative romantic relationships, family rejection, and social discrimination. As Lambert states, “[t]hose of us who have assisted people in trying to reclaim their voice know that it requires a tremendous sensitivity to successfully bring people to a point where they trust that the stories they do tell are vital, emotionally powerful, and unique.”<sup>19</sup> In order to help our collaborators to think about the stories they needed to tell and to find the voice they wanted to explore, we tried to create a supportive environment by sharing personal stories of our own. Our ethical approach to digital storytelling is based on vulnerability and reciprocity, which does not negate the existence of power relations, but seeks to minimize them. Moving beyond the introduction of ourselves and the required presentation of the *Sexualidades Campesinas* project, we told our own personal narratives: from home anecdotes to migration stories, from love tales to romantic disappointments, from sibling rivalries to family bonding experiences, and from professional frustrations to academic achievements. Telling our narratives helped to establish a safe space where storytellers could talk about their own personal lives and experiences, which created in turn a personal and emotional bond between participants and facilitators in the project.

Indeed, sharing stories of our own was, to a certain degree, our strategy to establish and consolidate a rapport with our community collaborators—an experience that echoes arguments made by Geraldine Bloustien regarding participatory video research: “Mutual respect and trust, achieved only through [...] culturally sensitive and nonjudgmental engagement [...], provided the essential underpinning to successful [collaborative] relationships.”<sup>20</sup> From our very first encounters with potential storytellers, we were certain of the importance of manifesting possible points of convergence, making evident our own identities and alliances. Very early in the project, we highlighted the fact that some of us were from Latin America or work on Latin American issues, that we speak Spanish and English, that we have ample experience working with Latino communities in the United States or with queer communities in Mexico, that we were involved in either normative or non-normative romantic relationships, and that we identify ourselves with particular ideas and practices of masculinity and femininity, among others. These efforts were an expression of our own critical thinking, particularly in relation to traditional protocols in storytelling. In exposing ourselves by sharing personal experiences and stories, we seek to trouble widespread notions of expertise and authority and question the conventional dynamic between storyteller and listener, where the former is open and vulnerable while the latter is a passive receptor.

The level of trust and intimacy that we were able to achieve was not taken for granted; it was not settled once and organically maintained. Rather, it required constant work; like a muscle, it needed to be exercised. This constant performance exemplifies ethics as an everyday practice. But, *ordinary ethics* is not only the potential to find ethics in daily actions: “the sensibility by which we recognize the ethical in the small acts of everyday life also alerts us to the lethal ways in which our capacity to hurt others might also be expressed in completely quotidian ways.”<sup>21</sup> In order to create a safe space for decision-making and storytelling that did not transform vulnerability into hazard, we tried to



maintain and strengthen our rapport with storytellers by meeting with them frequently and in private spaces. While some of our encounters indeed took place at restaurants and coffee shops, many of them were at either their homes or ours; in some occasions we had the opportunity to spend time with their family members and close friends, and vice versa. In addition, we tried to use such meetings not only to work on the creative storytelling process, but also to take part in other activities we all were passionate about. That is how we came to eat homemade Mexican food, share margaritas, and perform karaoke together.

Indeed, while our relationships with our community collaborators were traversed by the digital storytelling project of *Sexualidades Campesinas*, our experiences together went far beyond it. By spending time creating the rapport described above over a period of months, we actually exceeded the storyteller/facilitator relationship and became quite good friends. Our presence in their lives and houses was undoubtedly attached to this digital project; sometimes we were those who were trying to manage time and assign tasks and responsibilities for the next meeting. Yet, there were other moments when we could only chat and share some tangential tales that were not directly related to the storytelling process. Sometimes we were not as productive as we wanted to be; life circumstances sometimes demanded that conversation prevail. There was excess; there was not a clear division between their project story and other personal experiences. In contrast to what the workshop format might allow, our one-on-one encounters with storytellers were fluid and organic—if a bit unwieldy.

However, regardless of how close and intimate our relationship with storytellers came to be, our personal and working experiences were quite different from theirs. Our social roles are unavoidably different, even if we create spaces in which we may suspend consciousness that ethics is about learning how to deal with difference. Several of our meetings made that evident. On several occasions one community collaborator, María Cárdenas, suggested a meeting on a day when it turned out she was coming home from a twelve or fourteen hour work shift, whether in a walnut processing plant or in searing hot tomato fields. While she did her best to work on the writing and recording processes on those days, it was clear for us that she was tired and indisposed, and that there was nothing we could do to alleviate the situation, other than reschedule the meeting. One storyteller, Carina López, was undergoing a gender transition that affected her both physically and emotionally, at times limiting our meetings and her participation in the storytelling production. Instances such as these reminded us that while we were in alliance with our community collaborators, working together to build camaraderie and friendship as well as a digital story project, their daily lives, struggles, and preoccupations were different from ours, which subsequently reduced their level of involvement in the project at some moments. This is also to say that the working and affective relationship established between storytellers and facilitators was certainly influenced by the facets that define us not only as potential collaborators but also as social subjects—that is, being farmers, students, professors, parents, etc.

### **Storytelling**

A major element of our collaborations focused specifically on telling personal stories. Storytelling is part of everyday life, a central element of many genres of lettered culture, including literary fiction, historiography, ethnography, biography, and epistolography; it is likewise a major component of mass media culture, whether commercial cinema, documentary film, television comedies and dramas, social media, newscasts, sports reporting, or even advertising. Storytelling, however, does not have its origins in media or print culture; it is also fundamental to oral culture. And while oral storytelling may fulfill some formal functions of recording history, defining values, or imparting wisdom across a

culture, it is also a part of everyday life in which most everyone participates, which is why it made sense with regard to our ethical aspirations. As Joe Lambert puts it:

Everyday [*sic*], with virtually no effort, you tell stories to other people. At the water cooler, the dinner table, walking your child to school, you find yourself reciting an event from memory to make a point, to give a “case” where the attitudes and actions of the characters provide insight to your audience.<sup>22</sup>

StoryCenter suggests thinking about a range of storytelling genres: character stories, memorial stories, adventure stories, accomplishment stories, place oriented stories, stories about livelihood or profession, recovery stories, love stories, discovery stories, dream stories, and coming of age stories.<sup>23</sup> It also suggests following seven storytelling steps within its community workshop format: 1) owning your insights; 2) owning your emotions; 3) finding the moment; 4) seeing your story; 5) hearing your story; 6) assembling your story, and 7) sharing your story.<sup>24</sup> A key element of the workshop format is the story circle, “the heart of the entire process,” which permits community members to think through the stories they’d like to tell together.<sup>25</sup> The StoryCenter methodology also calls for workshop facilitators to provide one-on-one support to storytellers as they elaborate their narratives.

As we have explained, our own process differs from the StoryCenter model for reasons discussed above. Without the infrastructure of community workshops, we could not use story circles to help storytellers focus in on the stories they wanted to tell and how they wanted to tell them. The methodological implications of the absence of this collective exercise imply a different story circle. We all shared stories but not all the stories were meant to become public. But even if this different participation strengthened our roles as facilitators, our revision of this existing methodology allowed us to take more time with each story and storyteller, creating the intimacy and trust that made the stories possible, while shaping our consciousness of an ethics of collaboration. This transformation shows the need to shape methodologies collectively based on the specific needs of collaborators for a specific project instead of imposing a generic methodology that does not fit the particular context at hand.

Given our particular circumstances, the role of facilitators engaging in one-on-one support in the storytellers’ creative process loomed larger, creating the possibility of a heavier-handed intervention on our part. Ever conscious of the potentially overbearing weight of anything we contributed to discussions during the story creating process, we chose to minimize our influence in the crafting of the narratives by leaving out any discussion of the seven storytelling steps, instead trusting our community collaborators’ instincts to shape their own stories through whatever process they chose. However, the dynamic of a process that was based on a relationship not between a collectivity of community members and a team of facilitators, but rather between individuals (whose relationship to community remained abstract) and facilitators, altered the dynamic of digital storytelling methodology, and constantly raised issues regarding the extent to which our process implied that the facilitator might easily take on a role approximating that of coauthor.

We approached the storytelling process self-consciously and critically, making a constant effort to minimize our interventions into community storytellers’ creative processes. However, this did not mean that we did not collaborate actively. A simultaneous (and ultimately greater) priority for us was to encourage community storytellers to take ownership of the storytelling process, which also implied not refusing to intervene, but rather allowing them to decide when and how much it was appropriate for us to participate.

We tried not to impose any specific notions of what makes a good story, or introduce any specific structural elements of effective stories. Instead we presented the genre of digital storytelling, showed some examples of digital stories—at first, from StoryCenter, and then, our project's stories once we had them—and discussed with our storytellers what they liked or did not like about them, and how they might or might not be effective in communicating their implicit messages via the internet (the main site of distribution that we were proposing for our project). We saw how different stories used images to complement or reiterate the audio. We talked about an imagined audience and the goals of storytelling. We then engaged in brainstorming discussions with our storytellers about what kind of stories they wanted to tell.

A few strategies we endeavored to incorporate into our discussions with storytellers were meant to minimize our interventions. We strove to establish our roles with storytellers not as expert authorities but as equals by, as outlined above, spending significant time building relationships as both working collaborators and friends. We also kept the limitations of the genre of digital storytelling on the table without insisting upon always respecting its limitations. For example, while we were trained to produce digital stories using still images (photographs), when one of our storytellers, Tania Solorio, insisted on wanting to use film clips for her story, we decided it made sense to purchase a video camera to film these sequences. While indeed moving images are not foreign to the genre, its most traditional form involves only still images, which has historically made it easy and inexpensive for anyone to produce a digital story—although contemporary smartphone technology has essentially altered this scenario. Storytellers did not necessarily think in terms of still or moving images, but rather in terms of images, which led them to film some of their own video clips or to offer up old home movies, which we were able to digitize and incorporate into their digital stories.

We aimed to be producers, enabling the stories to get made by providing technical and creative support and a venue for distribution, while we tried to ensure that storytellers were more than mere screenwriters or actors, but actually assumed the role of hands on directors of their stories. We maintained flexibility and a willingness to improvise at every step of the production process, accommodating storytellers' desires to edit or even recast their stories not only during the creation process, but at all stages of production, including the latter ones. Not limited by time restraints that might be imposed through a community workshop format, storytellers were able to manage the pace of the creation process according to their own schedules and preferences.

However, we did not by any means remain off in the distance during the creation process. A non-interventionist approach seemed to contradict our understanding of ethics as reciprocal as we wanted to embrace our role and make it visible. Thus, from our very first meetings with potential storytellers, as they came to understand what the genre was, and how they wanted to make use of it to contribute to the very roughly articulated parameters of our project, we began to follow their lead in negotiating what their and our roles would be in the creation and production of their stories—and even in the selection of images (to avoid copyright infringement). For example, while some storytellers knew from the beginning exactly what stories they wanted to tell, others looked to us for help in deciding which of many possible stories they would tell. It can by no means be assumed that a single storyteller has only one story to tell; in some cases, the issue was how to choose that one story, while in others it was more a matter of helping storytellers think about how to incorporate multiple elements that they considered essential into a single story, even when it meant complicating their story more than might be ideal for the genre. We were also called upon to help storytellers avoid digressions that they could not help

recounting as the storytelling process is often a soul-searching endeavor, a means of consolidation of identity and self-understanding.

It was important for us to become aware of how community partners were most comfortable telling stories. We kept our training in digital storytelling in mind, but were always ready to improvise in accordance with the circumstances at hand. Tania Solorio, one of our storytellers, quickly produced a written story. Another was hesitant to write, but instead recorded her draft story orally onto her telephone, then asked us to transcribe it for her. In another case, the storyteller needed us to take notes as she orally worked through the content of her story.

Community partners also handled the visual element of digital storytelling in different ways. Some were easily able to visualize the story they wanted to tell, and had many ideas regarding images that would accompany their narratives. Others were more passive or less naturally creative in this area. One storyteller, who was deeply comfortable writing narrative but not working with images, provided only a few photographs, preferring that we be the ones to draft the visual track of his story, for his subsequent comments and ultimate approval. While we reinforced that storytellers had the ultimate authority over the use of visual materials, we were ready to contribute our ideas whenever we were asked to do so.

Furthermore, we often served as a sounding board for ideas, and acted as archivists of discussions, an important function in some cases due to the complicated nature of the storytellers' work or personal or family lives, which often required breaks of several weeks or even longer between meetings. Storytellers often sought out our opinions about their ideas; this was tricky as they inevitably saw us as university professors and graduate students, as authorities whose opinions carried significant weight. We were afraid that any negative reaction on our part might end up functioning as an effective veto. As we accepted the impossibility of a completely horizontal relationship, we embraced a version of ethics in which we recognized the tensions and challenges of collaborating. There were also cases where our community collaborators felt so strongly about their ideas that they had the confidence to override our opinions. In addition, it was clear at many moments that storytellers felt affirmed upon obtaining our approval, and that our relationship – and our position of authority – fueled their creativity. It was crucial for us to constantly think about questions of attention, care, respect, and appreciation in our dealings with our storytelling partners.

Ultimately, the creative process ended up being deeply collaborative. However, we also believe that our storytellers truly feel that they are the authors of their stories – and we feel that they are, as well. What we have learned from our process is that in order for digital storytelling to work in a way that empowers community members to tell their own stories, and thereby assure a significant degree of authenticity in their content, a deep – and in many ways hands on – but very carefully managed collaboration on the part of facilitating partners is essential.

### **Performance**

The dissemination potential for *Sexualidades Campesinas* transcends the academic audience that we, its facilitators, know best. The stories' digital quality creates the possibility for sharing them outside traditional networks of research circulation (conferences, articles protected by paywalls, publications not easily accessible to readers due to use of academic jargon), and their audiovisual format makes them accessible to many who might not engage as readily with print culture. Challenging the written word as the conventional language of research, performance theory, and research methods is especially relevant. The notion of performance helps us understand an embodied

research model that only exists in the doing, in our interaction and collaboration with storytellers. It allows us to embrace the lack of precision and objectivity, and the role of embodied documentation of our process. More importantly, it keeps us critical about the dangers of visibility and reproducibility.

Following Diana Taylor, we understand performance as an object of study, a research process and an epistemology:

Performance, on one level, constitutes the object/process of analysis in performance studies, that is the many practices and events—dance, theatre, ritual, political rallies, funerals—that involve theatrical, rehearsed, or conventional/event-appropriate behaviors[...] On another level, performance also constitutes the methodological lens that enables scholars to analyze events *as* performance. Civic disobedience, resistance, citizenship, gender, ethnicity, and sexual identity, for example, are rehearsed and performed daily in the public sphere.<sup>26</sup>

Performance theory helps us understand our digital storytelling project by leading us to pay attention to the practices and events that are part of its realization: finding participants, developing trust, creating collaboratively, using technology, editing. In doing so, we privilege the role of embodiment in knowledge production. Thinking about the research process and our roles as researchers as examples of an embodied practice informed by rehearsal and improvisation, brings to the fore knowledge that is experiential and transmitted by “being there.”

Despite the apparent divide between performance (embodied) and the digital (disembodied), we turn to the notion of performance in order to locate our project within a framework in which we pay as much attention to process as to outcome. What this means is that we recognize that our goals in researching farm working communities cannot be separated from colonial power relations that have been historically reproduced by academic research. Indigenous methodologies demonstrate the connections between academic production of knowledge and strengthening of racialized hierarchies that support marginalization and oppression.<sup>27</sup> The coloniality of power<sup>28</sup> has not only affected the binary interaction between researchers and researched, but it has reinforced writing as the center of knowledge production, not surprisingly excluding the researched from participating in the production and consumption of research outcomes. Recognizing embodied practices as knowledge, and interacting with storytellers for extended periods of time, motivates interaction that is itself performative and that occurs before and outside writing.

Following the “practice turn,” our project uses performance as part of a process of knowledge production that expands what is valuable and who gets to participate in research. As Shannon Rose Riley and Lynette Hunter remind us,

[w]hile performance practices have always contributed to knowledge, the idea that performance can be more than creative production, that it can constitute intellectual inquiry and contribute new understanding and insight is a concept that challenges many institutional structures and calls into question what gets valued as knowledge. Perhaps the most singular contribution of the developing areas of practice as research (PaR) and performance as research (PAR) is the claim that creative production can constitute intellectual inquiry.<sup>29</sup>

Digital storytelling can be read as an example of the qualitative research model that PaR and PAR promote. As a collaborative and embodied method, it requires a specific theatrical kind of storytelling that is both framed by the limits of the genre and shaped by

the roles and desires of the participants. Its practice is embodied and constituted by the rehearsal of specific roles (e.g. facilitator, storyteller) and, most especially in our idiosyncratic one-on-one production method, requires improvisation to negotiate the specifics of every story with its storyteller. Accordingly, the decisions made to create each story collaboratively show that identity and self-representation are also daily performances. As Sonja Vivienne and Jean Burgess state, “[u]nlike face-to-face performances of identity, digital stories offer the opportunity for a refined, reflective articulation of self.”<sup>30</sup> Every digital story is a shaped representation of narrative, images, audio, and events that were carefully selected by our storytellers, in collaboration with the team members, to present their life stories and identities for public consumption. In this way, decisions about selection and editing are also performative, and create the identities and stories themselves.

As researchers, our performance is informed by our expectations during our encounters with storytellers. As organic as every interaction with our collaborators has been, every meeting is a mix between familiarity and productivity. Our role is always to recall, to organize, to moderate, and to advance, even when the mood is festive and relaxed. Improvisation and rehearsal make up our default modus operandi, due to each interaction with a storyteller being different and irreproducible, but the performance of our roles is informed by a never fixed hierarchy that is, nonetheless, visible and tangible. Our digital storytelling project functions as a scripted performance that allows flexibility within the limits of our roles.

Through rehearsal and improvisation, staging—something we’d never thought about or planned—became part of our process. One storyteller, Tania Solorio, selected pictures from family albums, old home movies, social media, and selfies from her cellphone for her story, “My Perfect Family,” and she suggested re-enacting some events through audio and still images. The reappropriation of her past performs a last piece of the healing process she articulates in her story, and the story constitutes a place of articulation and potential engagement with its audience.

In other stories, performance took the shape of change. In “Metamorphosis,” a story about a transition to femininity embodies change as storytelling, as hormone-therapy replacement took place during the process of the story production. As embodiment of change, this storyteller decided to perform change in her storytelling by publicly sharing her experience and using the explicit metaphor of a butterfly to describe her journey. Embodiment became storytelling as she decided to organize her images chronologically to reflect her transition. At the same time, her story and her interactions with team members reflect a conscious performance of femininity: from the tone of her voice to the feminine aesthetics of the images selected for her story. The performative character of this story reifies her femininity and identity.

For storytellers that are used to performing as part of their professional practice, such as Rigoberto González, a former farmworker who is nowadays a college professor and award winning writer, the story is shaped by the specific skills that inform their practice. His story, for example, reflects a vocal delivery based on his expertise in public readings. His knowledge is an embodied practice that informs the use of his declamation skills as his story’s main strategy to connect his writing with an audience that can identify with his life experiences. By focusing on the aural performance, his story decenters the visual as the most representative aspect of digital storytelling. His decision to create a longer story reflects his interest in telling his story without the constraints of length that digital storytelling imposes, as well as a non-hierarchical engagement with the project.

Some of our storytellers are, despite a lack of professional experience, talented entertainers. María Cárdenas's way of being is an energetic performance that reflects her personality and wit. She sings, tells stories, and is playful with her family and anyone who interacts with her. She is comfortable in front of strangers and tells her story in different venues but always with the same energy, opening space for difficult conversations about sexuality and identity. Her ingrained acting skills made it easy for her to perform and improvise for the camera. Her story "Man, Woman or Fish" reflects both spontaneous play and theatrical doing that recognizes the public character of her performance. Her first audio take was the one she wanted to use, with minimal editing required. Her story used performance as a tool to reach to people that might be experiencing the confusion of questioning their sexual identity. Performance reveals that public storytelling involves the staging of aesthetic elements as a reflection of the storyteller. The selection of images and words is a negotiation process that is performative as it creates a self-representation.

As we have seen, both the process and the outcomes of digital storytelling create visibility for the priorities established in this negotiation process by the storyteller and the facilitators. But as our project's goal is to make visible the struggles of members of farm working communities, thinking about performance as what exceeds reproduction and escapes the finished products brings to our attention all the embodied knowledge that we have not encountered and remains invisible. As Peggy Phelan affirms, visibility does not equal power: "Visibility and invisibility are crucially bound; invisibility polices visibility and in this specific sense functions as the ascendant term in the binary. Gaining visibility for the politically under-represented without scrutinizing the power of who is required to display what to whom is an impoverished political agenda."<sup>31</sup> Visibility also contributes to our ethical understanding of the process, as being visible creates the potential for political representation but does not erase marginalization.

### **Mediation**

Mediation is an inherent aspect of communication. Every time a message is exchanged, its signs acquire different meanings according to the socio-cultural intricacies of the context in which it is transmitted. Moreover, its meanings are shaped by the intentions, worldviews, and sociocultural orientations of its receptor and emitter. Conventionally, the definition of mediation has stemmed from theoretical debates in semiotics. However, mediation within the practice and theory of digital storytelling—or in any context in which a third party (in this case, the facilitator) or technology itself plays a key role in enabling communication—exceeds the context of the mere speech act or direct and straightforward act of transmission of signs. Mediation is a reminder of difference and the importance of imagining otherwise before we are able to create a political intervention.

Mediation may of course refer to a form of negotiation of meaning and power between agents, contexts and forms of communication. Because of the multimodal aspects of digital storytelling, mediation frequently occurs during the production, dissemination, and remote reception of digital stories.<sup>32</sup> In a mediated space, such as that of digital storytelling, it is imperative to recognize the pivotal role of power structures within personal and interpersonal dynamics, the goal of "authenticity" in the genre of digital storytelling, the implications of the use of digital media, and the potentiality of social relations that can be established through digital narratives.

The most obvious mediation that occurs in digital storytelling is that of the facilitator, the one who has the expertise and resources to assist a storyteller in crafting, recording, producing, editing, and ultimately disseminating a digital story. In addition, the technologies of production and diffusion themselves act as mediators between storyteller and audience.



These mediations are not unidirectional. Indeed, media representations of personal experience carry a symbolic charge that may potentially transform the way in which storytellers perceive themselves. This dialectic between personal life experience and digital media complicates the communication process as the initial meanings imagined by the storyteller at the beginning of the creation and production process cannot be assumed to be stable. According to Ola Erstad and James Wertsch:

[a]ny form of mediation involves some form of limitation [...] The important point here, and again, a point that is often missed in sociological or psychological studies, is that when a new tool, a new medium is introduced into the flow of action, it does not simply facilitate or make an existing form of action more efficient. The emphasis is in how it transforms the form of action, on the qualitative transformative, as opposed to facilitative, role of cultural tools.<sup>33</sup>

This “qualitative transformative role” of digital storytelling also speaks to the issue of access to the public sphere. Following Erstad and Wertsch, digital storytelling elevates oral culture, situating storytellers in a place of empowerment and thereby reframing subjectivity.

One of the first experiences of mediation in digital storytelling occurs when the storyteller faces the question about what story to tell. This introspection in the act of searching for a defining life experience poses challenges to the storyteller: what to recount? why recount it? and how to recount it? Storytellers mediate the content, form, and representation of the narrative that is significantly meaningful to them, bringing to the surface questions of inner versus public identity. Within the margins of our project on digital narratives from sexually diverse migrant farm workers, the power of the medium transforms the story that gets told and, to some extent, may transform identity. Identity becomes a site of mediation in that the assemblage of selfhood, as part of the process of storytelling, brings the storyteller to become aware of life’s contradictions and complexities. This fragmentation of identity categories highlights the “multivoicedness” of digital narratives, alluding to the intersectionality and instability of identity (e.g. lesbian/farmworker/mother/Mexican immigrant).

We chose to work with digital storytelling because we believed that it would allow collaborators with little if any means of making their personal stories public to tell their stories without significant interventions from our research team as their mediators. However, as discussed above, it soon became clear to us that neither we as facilitators nor the technologies we introduced could be employed in such a way as to erase our roles. All we could do to shape our ethical process was to accept that we would be mediators, and do our best to deploy our mediations in as self-conscious and collaborative a way as possible, so that the storytellers with whom we worked could use both human and technological facilitators to their best advantage.

However, we admit that our role loomed large. Regardless of the bonding that we achieved with storytellers, we remained representatives of an institution of higher education. While we conformed to the schedules and energy levels of the storytellers, they also conformed to ours, with our own work demands, travel plans, and personal activities asserting themselves right along with those of the storytellers.

And while the technologies we used to record, edit, produce, and eventually post our digital stories on the internet were all meant to facilitate and not mediate, these technologies likewise asserted themselves frequently, imposing screen resolutions, sound quality, screen shape, and various stylistic details on the stories.

A final mediating factor was that of language itself. Like everyday life for most California farmworkers, our digital story project was conceived as bilingual. Some storytellers were native Spanish speakers; others were native English speakers; all were bilingual. Considering both how they preferred to express themselves and how they preferred to present themselves to their imagined audiences, storytellers chose to speak in English or Spanish (with subtitles added in the other language). Language in the context of bilingual California is also a site for mediation. Issues of word choice, register, code switching, idiomatic expressions, inflection, and other aspects of orality all mediate differently across the two languages, particularly when one is spoken and the other appears written across the screen. The practices of translation and subtitling in the editing process also became a common mediated space in which selecting a language of speech was influenced by the imagined audience of each storyteller.

## Conclusion

In the end, mediating our affective bonds with our storytelling collaborators and performing our roles as facilitators guided our ethical concerns to minimize unwanted interventions and kept our roles subordinate to those of the storytellers themselves in the crafting and production of their stories. We recognize that it would have been foolish to imagine that we could somehow set things up so that our narrators could truly produce their digital stories on their own, without our inevitable mediations making an impact on them. So rather than strive to erase ourselves, we aimed to carry out a meticulously careful collaboration that helped to construct and ultimately maintain the authority and ownership of the storyteller author-directors in their production.

It was our particular reformulation of the digital storytelling production method that led us to focus so intently on our roles. No longer mere leaders of workshops in which multiple voices of pre-articulated communities were the majority, our personalized production process drew attention to our performances, our strategies for bonding with our collaborators, our mediations (and those of the technologies we offered), the instability of the notion of community, and, most especially, the importance of a constant attention to an ethics of collaboration.

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## Notes

1. See Catherine Coleborn and Elaine Bliss, "Emotions, Digital Tools and Public Histories: Digital Storytelling using Windows Movie Maker in the History Tertiary Classroom," *History Compass* 9, no. 9 (2011): 674–85; Patrick Lowenthal, "Digital Storytelling in Education: An Emerging Institutional Technology?" in John Hartley and Kelly McWilliam, eds., *Story Circle: Digital Storytelling Around the World* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 252–9. [↗](#)
2. We were trained in Digital Storytelling following the StoryCenter method, which we then adapted for the context of our project. [↗](#)

3. Although we shared our plans of writing and publishing about the project, we decided not to invite our collaborators as coauthors. All mentions of the project storytellers and the storytelling process are based on our fieldnotes, memories, and close readings of the stories and the process. [↗](#)
4. See Guillermo Nuñez Noriega, *Just Between Us: An Ethnography of Male Identity and Intimacy in Rural Communities of Northern Mexico* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2014); Robert McKee Irwin, *Mexican Masculinities* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003); Lionel Cantú, *The Sexuality of Migration: Border Crossings and Mexican Immigrant Men* (New York: New York University Press, 2009); Karma Chávez, "Identifying the Needs of LGBTQ Immigrants and Refugees in Southern Arizona," *Journal of Homosexuality* 58, no. 2 (2011): 189–218; Nayan Shah, *Stranger Intimacy: Contesting Race, Sexuality and the Law in the North American West* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011); and Raúl Balbuena Bello, *Gays en el desierto: Paradojas de la manifestación pública en Mexicali* (Mexicali: UABC, Mantarraya Ediciones, 2015). [↗](#)
5. Jean Burgess, "Hearing Ordinary Voices: Cultural Studies, Vernacular Creativity and Digital Storytelling," *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies* 20, no. 2 (2006): 201. [↗](#)
6. Nick Couldry, "Digital Storytelling, Media Research and Democracy," in *Digital Storytelling, Mediatized Stories: Self-Representations in New Media*, ed. Knut Lundby (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 54. [↗](#)
7. Joe Lambert, *Digital Storytelling: Capturing lives, Creating Community* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 1. [↗](#)
8. Lara Worcester, "Reframing Digital Storytelling as Co-creative," *IDS Bulletin* 43, no. 5 (2012): 91. [↗](#)
9. Worcester, "Reframing Digital Storytelling," 92. [↗](#)
10. Aline Gubrium, Amy Hill, and Sarah Flicker, for example, interrogate issues around the "fuzzy boundaries" around research and advocacy, recruitment and consent procedures, the power of shaping digital stories, potential harm to storytellers, confidentiality, and the (public) release of materials. See "A Situated Practice of Ethics for Participatory Visual and Digital Methods in Public Health Research and Practice: A Focus on Digital Storytelling," *American Journal of Public Health* 104, no. 9 (September 2014): 1606–14. [↗](#)
11. Gubrium, Hill, and Flicker, "A Situated Practice of Ethics," 1610. [↗](#)
12. Mexico City legalized changes to legal gender and name for transgender people in 2008, and same-sex marriage and adoption in 2009, but the rest of the country is still slowly catching up, with states like Yucatán banning same-sex marriage in 2009. Intolerance and violence against the LGBTQI community are still present. [↗](#)
13. See, for example, the StoryCenter's *Silence Speaks Projects*. One of these projects worked with indigenous groups in the Rift Valley of Africa, Central Asia, and Northwestern Mexico, aiming to "enable participants to continue documenting stories within their *communities*" (<http://www.storycenter.org/case-studies/christensen>, emphasis ours). More locally, in Northern California, a UC Davis-based digital storytelling project titled *A Passion for the Land* worked with local "*community partners*," on a project designed to "produce and present digital stories on current challenges to agricultural viability and rural *community* life in the Sierra Valley" ([http://artofregionalchange.ucdavis.edu/?page\\_id=49](http://artofregionalchange.ucdavis.edu/?page_id=49), emphasis ours).

In addition, Joe Lambert's book is subtitled "creating lives, creating *community*" (emphasis ours). Community is a key concept underlying a substantial proportion of digital storytelling projects. [↗](#)

14. See Miranda Joseph, *Against the Romance of Community* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002.) [↗](#)
15. See Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.) [↗](#)
16. See J. Jack Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: NYU Press, 2005); Roderick Ferguson, "Sissies at the Picnic: The Subjugated History of a Black Rural Queer" in *Feminist Waves, Feminist Generations: Life Stories of Three Generations in the Academy*, eds. Hokulani Aikau, Karl Erickson, and Jennifer Pierce (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007); Scott Herring, *Another Country: Queer Anti-Urbanism* (New York: NYU Press, 2010); Jessica Jones, "Spatializing Sexuality in Jaime Hernandez's *Locas*," *Aztlan: A Journal of Chicano Studies* 30, no. 1 (2009): 35–64; Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006). [↗](#)
17. Burgess, "Hearing Ordinary Voices," 210. [↗](#)
18. Lambert, *Digital Storytelling*, 23. [↗](#)
19. Lambert, *Digital Storytelling*, 23. [↗](#)
20. Geraldine Bloustien, "Play, Affect, and Participatory Video as a Reflexive Research Strategy," in *Handbook of Participatory Video*, ed. E-J Milne et al. (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2012), 125. [↗](#)
21. Veena Das, "Ordinary Ethics," in *A Companion to Moral Anthropology*, ed. Didier Fassin. (Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 142. [↗](#)
22. Lambert, *Digital Storytelling*, 15. [↗](#)
23. Lambert, *Digital Storytelling*, 19–22. [↗](#)
24. Lambert, *Digital Storytelling*, 53–69. [↗](#)
25. Lambert, *Digital Storytelling*, 77. [↗](#)
26. Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 3. [↗](#)
27. Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London: Zed Books, 2012). [↗](#)
28. Aníbal Quijano, "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America," *Nepantla: Views from the South* 1, no. 3 (2000): 533–80. [↗](#)
29. Shannon Rose Riley and Lynette Hunter, eds., *Mapping Landscapes for Performance as Research: Scholarly Arts and Creative Cartographies* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), xv. [↗](#)
30. Sonja Vivienne and Jean Burgess. "The Digital Storyteller's Stage: Queer Everyday Activists Negotiating Privacy and Publicness," *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 56, no. 3 (2012): 374. [↗](#)
31. Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 26. [↗](#)
32. Birgit Hertzberg Kaare and Knut Lundby, "Mediatized Lives: Autobiography and Assumed Authenticity in Digital Storytelling," in *Digital Storytelling, Mediatized Stories: Self-Representations in New Media*, ed. Knut Lundby (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 107. [↗](#)
33. Ola Erstad and James Wertsch, "Tales of Mediation: Narrative and Digital Media as Cultural Tools," in *Digital Storytelling, Mediatized Stories: Self-Representations in New Media*, ed. Knut Lundby (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 27. [↗](#)

 [Bio](#)



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